

- Thousands Of Acres, Including Entire Black Dirt Region, Have Been Damaged By Standing Water From Last Week's Nor'Easter -

- Farmers Across The Region Worry They Won't Be Able To Salvage Crops Currently Submerged in Flood Water – Schumer, Hall Push for Prompt USDA Aid -

U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer and U.S. Representative John Hall today called on the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary, Mike Johanns, to personally tour farmlands in the Hudson Valley to get a firsthand look at the flood damage from last week's Nor'easter. Thousands of acres are covered in standing water, leaving many farmers concerned that they will not be able to salvage their crops this season. Onion and sod farmers in the black dirt region of Orange County will suffer particular damage because black dirt acres that have been lost can not be re-developed. This request comes one day after FEMA Administrator R. David Paulison toured the region to assess damage to individuals and small businesses in the flood-stricken communities.

"The rain and the flooding this week hit farmers in the Hudson Valley very hard and they are just beginning the recovery process. Many farms looked like lakes and the USDA must step up now to provide all necessary aid so that farmers don't lose a season before it has even begun. Dealing with the mess could cost farmers millions of dollars in lost crops and damaged land and equipment," Schumer said.

Hall toured several onion and sod farms in Orange County on Saturday, meeting with farmers and viewing the flood damage.

"The flooding brought on by this devastating storm has affected farms throughout the Hudson Valley," said Hall. "New York's farmers have already been hurt by an exceptionally long winter this year. The damage from this storm could make bad conditions worse for these farms that are essential to New York's economy and quality of life. These farmers deserve swift action on any federal assistance they need to recover quickly and begin to rebuild their livelihoods."

Following last week's storms in the Hudson Valley, massive flooding of the Wallkill and Pochuck rivers left the entire black dirt region of Orange County, in Pine Island, and several farms in Dutchess and Ulster Counties under water. Even after the floods receded, the fields looked like lakes for days because of excessive standing water. The damage in Orange County is of particular concern to onion farmers who rely on the black dirt to grow their crop. With over 14,000 acres of black dirt land damaged by the floods, onion farmers are worried they may not be able to salvage the planting season this year. The planting window for onions has dangerously narrowed. With a deadline to have seeds in the ground by the first week of May, farmers will be scrambling to clear ditches and fields, and then finally plant this year's onions and other vegetables.

The farming industry in Pine Island is primarily made up of onion farmers and sod farmers who rely on the black dirt. The damage to the dirt is especially devastating because black dirt only occurs naturally and can not be developed. Sod, the black dirt's second largest crop after onions, could be hit the hardest because these farmers plant in the fall and were bouncing back

from the devastation of two floods in 2005. The damage to sod farms will not be known until weeks after the waters recede. All black dirt farmers agree that these are the worst storms on record since the 1950s.

Once damage data has been collected in the affected counties and submitted to the state, Governor Spitzer must write to President Bush and USDA Secretary Johanns to request federal assistance. If the disaster declaration is approved by the President, emergency federal aid will be released to farmers to rehabilitate farmland damaged by the natural disaster.